

## **November 22, 1963**

*As Lived by*

**Paul K. Wilkins DPD # 1469**

Dawn of November 22, 1963 produced a chilly rain soaked morning. My alarm clock signaled 5:45AM, time to start the day. I rolled out of bed with no idea what lay ahead.

I had been a Dallas police officer since February 24, 1958 and was considered a "veteran" officer. The preceding year had not been particularly good for me. An unpleasant divorce had occurred in November of 1962, my mom had died on January 3, 1963, and I had been transferred to the Northeast station from Central. I was living with my widowed father, Graham Wilkins, at 1949 Las Cruces Lane in Dallas. By the time November arrived several things had improved my outlook considerably. I had met Edna, the beautiful lady who would soon become my wife and had been told that I would shortly be transferred to the Traffic Division as an Accident Investigator.

(My Father Graham Wilkins below)



Edna and Me

After a quick shower and shave I had a cup of coffee with my father. We chatted about the weather and impending visit of President Kennedy. My Dad was the Chief Inspector for the Dallas Car Interchange Bureau and his office was in the Union Terminal building at Young and Houston Streets only a couple of blocks South of Dealey Plaza. He said that he had meetings scheduled and probably would not be able to watch the parade and he was correct. He didn't get out of the office until after the event was over.

Shortly after 6 AM I walked out the kitchen door onto the car port and raised the top and installed the side windows on my MGA and started the twenty minute drive to the Northeast Station. At this time of day the traffic was fairly light and I made good time even though a light rain was falling. Usually in Dallas when it rained, even slightly, it caused problems with traffic but not today. By the time I turned off Northwest Highway onto Goforth Road the rain had stopped. I turned on to Adlora Lane and into the Station parking lot at about 6:45AM. Day watch officers were beginning to arrive and the lot was filling up. I found my usual spot vacant and slid right in.

The detail times in 1963 were 7AM for the even number squads and 7:30 AM for the odd numbered ones. This system kept half of the watch available for call while relief was made for the other half. On November 22, 1963 I was assigned to work squad 43 which meant that I reported at 7:30 AM. Our watch commander, Lt. Earl Knox, was off duty and Sgt. R.D.Shipley was acting watch commander. He was supported by Sgt. B.J.Maxey and Sgt. Don Flusche.



R.D.Shipley

7AM detail ended and the early squad officers made their way out the front door of the station to relieve their first watch counterparts. Relief was made at the curb in front of the station unless you were originating a car. In that case you had to walk to the garage and draw a vehicle.

After changing into my uniform and buffing my shoes I grabbed a cup of coffee and wandered into the Detail Room. The Detail Room at the Northeast Station had roughly 12 tables, six on each side divided by an aisle with a desk, lectern, and overhead projector at the front of the room. The officers to be briefed sat at the tables and the



B.J.Maxey

supervisors sat at the desk. Prior to the actual roll call and detailed briefing each officer received two sheets of paper. One was the "hot sheet" that contained descriptions and license numbers of stolen cars and the other was a list of wanted persons and a record of offences that occurred, in the past 24 hours, in our areas of responsibility. (Below - Don Flusche)



These sheets were read, folded in half, and placed in your hat for safekeeping and easy access. After picking up the sheets I walked to the rear of the detail room and sat down next to officer G.L. (Gerry) Tolbert. Gerry (below) had been a classmate at the DPD Academy in 1958 and we had remained friends.



During detail, after the assignments and roll call, we were briefed on the Presidential visit scheduled that day. We were given the approximate times of the arrival at Love Field and the departure for downtown. We were told that the operation would be conducted on Channel 2 and for us to refrain from any chatter on that Channel. In 1963 the department had the use of two channels in the city radio system. Channel 1 was the primary and all official transmissions were done on that channel. Channel 2 was used only as backup and for special events. And sometimes, although officially frowned on, for a little lighthearted banter. Police work at 3 or 4 AM can get a little boring at times.

After detail Gerry and I walked outside to find the officers we were relieving and started discussing the presidential visit and as I recall each of us expressed

a desire to be downtown when the motorcade passed. It seemed an impossibility since neither of us had an assignment that would place each of us in any vantage point. So we agreed to call each other if any opportunity presented itself. We relieved the first watch officers and each went to work.

The morning passed rather quickly as I answered a couple of calls on offences that had occurred overnight, called in the reports, and began patrolling beats 43 and 44. In the event that the manpower allocation did not allow for a man on each beat we sometimes had to cover more than one area. My assignment for the day was also to cover beat 44. My area of responsibility was bounded on the West and North by the MK&T Railroad right of way, on the East by Abrahams Road, and the South by Vickery Blvd.

The sun was shining and the weather improving to the point of being a pretty nice day.

Around 10:20 AM I had followed a traffic violator down Abrams Rd. to Gaston Ave. and stopped him. After I talked to the errant driver and issued a speeding citation I continued West on Gaston Ave and turned North on Annex to turn around and head back to my beat.

There was a large apartment complex on the Northwest corner of Gaston and Annex with a couple of medium sized trees located on a grassy area in front of the buildings. And there, just waking from a nights sleep on the ground, still wet from the earlier rain was well known police character and vagrant. I recall that his name was Joe Pat and that I had arrested him several times before. There was a regular clientele of similar characters. In the politically correct vernacular of today they are referred to as "the homeless" but in 1963 they were vagrants and people in need of

protection. For the most part they were happiest when in jail and would commit minor offences in the hope of being incarcerated. There were 12 to 15 of these guys and they filled positions in the jail. Some were cooks, some served meals, some ran the jail elevators, while others assisted in the booking room. More than a few of them listed their home address as 106 South Harwood, Dallas City Jail. They were pretty much like old friends.

Joe Pat looked at me and said words to the effect, "it's about time you got here". He got up and walked over to me to be searched then got in the passenger's side of my car. A glance at my watch told me that there was time to kill before checking out with prisoner or we would be back on the street before the motorcade arrived downtown. I decided to wait until around 11:30 AM to notify the dispatcher.

Joe Pat realized that we had not immediately headed for jail and started complaining that he was hungry and wanted to get on downtown because lunch was served at 11AM. He got louder and louder so I drove over to a small drive in restaurant on East Grand and bought him a hamburger to keep him quiet.

At about 11:35AM, I called 53 (Tolbert) to meet me and we checked out to the jail with a prisoner. We locked Gerry's car, put Joe Pat in the back seat of my car, and headed downtown to the jail located at 106 South Harwood Street. The entrance to the basement parking area was on the Main Street side and could only be made from the eastbound direction. Left turns into the basement were not permitted.

We parked the car and walked our prisoner into the jail office. Before a prisoner could be incarcerated the details of the arrest had to meet the criteria of

the charged offence and approved by a jail supervisor. I recall that Sgt. Reuben Wisseman was the Jail Supervisor on duty that day. He was acquainted with Joe Pat as a regular guest in the "Harwood Hilton" and gave his approval to the charge of City Vagrancy. The elements of the charge were essentially, no money, no place to sleep, and no visible means of support. All of these applied to Joe Pat.

After receiving the OK from Sgt. Wisseman, Gerry and I placed our Service revolvers in the jail office gun lockers and called for the elevator. I don't remember the name of the elevator operator that day but he and Joe Pat were friends and exchanged pleasantries during the ride to the fourth floor.

The elevator opened into the booking area on each of the two floors that housed the city jail. We exited the elevator into the fourth floor booking area and turned our prisoner over to jail personnel to be processed. While this was being done we completed the arrest reports and turned them in.

A trustee brought us some coffee and we walked into the public area and to a window on the Harwood street side of the City Hall. I would estimate that the time was about 12:15 PM. We sipped our coffee and watched the crowd gathering on the sidewalks below. Only a short time passed until we saw the motorcade approaching on Harwood Street from the North. As the parade drew closer we could see the people waving and clapping. We were around 100 feet away and had a great view from our window.

As the motorcade turned from South on Harwood Street to West on Main Street we were looking down directly into the President's car. That picture is etched in my mind even after 45 years. I shall never forget the pink pillbox hat that

Jackie Kennedy was wearing and the darkness of her hair.

After the motorcade has passed from our sight Gerry and I re-entered the fourth floor jail area and rode the elevator back to the basement and retrieved our revolvers from the gun lockers. We walked back to our squad car and drove out of the basement onto Commerce Street, proceeded east to Central and turned north. I cleared with the dispatcher and started back to the location of Gerry's car.

Two classmates from recruit school, M.J. Jackson and C.E. Hulse were dispatching on Channel One.



M.J. Jackson

Shortly after clearing Officer Jackson dispatched the call to "all squads in the downtown area, Signal 19, Elm and Houston". This indicated a shooting had occurred and that we were to proceed under emergency conditions. I checked "En Route", turned West onto Elm Street, engaged the red lights and siren and proceeded Code 3 to the location.

The traffic on Elm Street was minimal



C.E. Hulse

and we covered the seventeen blocks in good time. I did not note the time we started the run or the time we arrived at the Texas School Book Depository but we encountered no problems and I estimate that no more than five minutes elapsed between the time I acknowledged the call and our arrival at the location.

We parked our vehicle at the Southeast corner of the building and on leaving the vehicle I instinctively pulled the shotgun from its rack spanning the front seat. With shotgun in hand I walked at a fast pace to the front of the building. Gerry stayed with the car at that time. He later told me that he was sent to search the railroad yards. I had left my partner stranded for I had the car keys in my pocket.

When I got to the front of the building I saw Captain C.E. Talbert, my Platoon Commander standing at the entrance and immediately reported to him. I asked where I was needed and he responded "go up to the sixth floor and find Sergeant Flusche and assist him".

Entering the front door of the School Book Depository I saw that the elevator was in use and asked someone the whereabouts of the stairs and was directed to the northwest corner of the building.

Six flights of stairs later the sixth floor resembled a maze. There were stacks of book cartons in all kinds of configurations. Some of the piles had five or six cartons and others had more. There were a number of officers from different agencies already present. I found out later that there were even a couple of officers from the Federal Game Management Agency. There were Sheriffs Deputies and both uniformed and plainclothes Dallas Police Officers.

Walking toward the Elm Street side of the building I spotted Officer L.D. Montgomery standing in the Southeast section of the floor.



L.D.Montgomery

He said something to the effect of "the shooter was here" and pointed to an area adjacent to the window in the Southeast corner of the building. I walked over to take a look. It appeared that several cases had been arranged to provide a shooting rest and several others to provide a shield of sorts from the rest of the floor. I saw three spent cartridges on the floor; two fairly close together and the third a couple of feet to the East.

A short distance north was the remains of a chicken dinner sitting on a carton of books. Others have said that there was a Dr.Pepper bottle also. I remember a soft drink bottle but I don't think it was a Dr.Pepper bottle. At least two others shared my thoughts on this.

After a few minutes I located Sgt. Flusche and asked for an assignment. He was trying to organize a systematic search of the floor. At this time Sgt. Flusche was the only supervisor in evidence on the sixth floor. He formed up a line of officers close to the south wall stretching from east to west. We were instructed to look for anything out of the ordinary and keep an eye out for the weapon used by the shooter. I was on the west end of the line as we started slowly moving toward the north. I don't know who was next to me on the right. D.P.D. Officers W.C.Flowers, R.W.Westphal, and O.J. Tarver were also in the line of searchers.

As we approached the stairwell I saw a portion of the rifle butt protruding from a stack of cartons close to the west wall. Sgt. Flusche was a couple of steps behind me and a little to my right so I looked over my right shoulder, got his attention, and pointed out the rifle to him. Immediately somebody to my right shouted "here's the rifle". I don't know the identity of the shooter. The rifle was in an upright position as though it had just been dropped behind the stack of book cartons by the shooter as he ran for



W.C. Flowers



O.J. Tarver



R.W. Westphal

the stairway. Sgt. Flusche instructed someone, I think it was W.C. Flowers, to find Captain Fritz and advise him that the rifle had been found. It seemed to be only a few seconds until The Captain arrived at our location. He was followed shortly by Lt. J. C. Day and R.L. Studebaker.

The rifle was not removed or touched until Lt. Day had finished his preliminary examination of it. When he had completed his work he removed the rifle from behind the book cartons and held it aloft for all to see.

When he raised the rifle over his head my first thought was "my God, it's a Carcano". I readily recognized the weapon and had no doubt as to its make because in late September or early October my father, Graham Wilkins, had purchased six of them from Titch-Gettinger department store in downtown Dallas and I had assisted him in remodeling them into hunting rifles. In fact I still have one of them.



Capt. Fritz

Lt. Day extended the rifle toward Captain Fritz. The Captain opened the bolt and ejected a live round onto the floor. As this was happening a civilian joined the group. I was told later that it was the building manager, Roy Truly. He seemed very agitated and told Sgt. Flusche that someone had reported to him that on the seventh floor the hole leading to the attic (he called it "the scuttle hole") had been found open and a ladder placed beside it. He also stated that it had not been that way before. Sgt. Flusche said "let's go to the attic" and a contingent of D.P.D. officers followed him to the seventh floor and into the attic. We thought that the building had been sealed and that the shooter was still somewhere inside.

At the time we left the sixth floor I had never heard anyone ask or volunteer any information about the make or brand name of the rifle that I found and reported to Sgt. Flusche. I found out a number of years later that Sgt. Flusche had also recognized the rifle as an Italian made Carcano. If we had not abruptly



Lt. J.C. Day

left the sixth floor to search the attic there would have been no confusion as to the identity of the rifle used by the assassin.

The group that went into the attic that day consisted of Sgt. Flusche, W.C. Flowers, R.W. Westphal, O.J. Tarver and me. The crawl space was only about four feet high and dimly lit. And it was also extremely dirty. Westphal's best suit was ruined that day.

During the time we were crawling through the attic one of the officers had a transistor radio tuned to station KLIF. It was the only form of communication available to us and we listened as we crawled. The news was incredible. The president was dead. Then the radio informed us that Officer Tippit had been killed. There were three Tippits on the Department and we didn't know which one had been shot. A few minutes later the radio reported that the Coast Guard was tracking an unidentified submarine off the coast at Galveston. The whole nation was close to panic it seemed.





R.I. Studebaker

Our search of the attic was time consuming but unproductive and we eventually ended our search on the roof.

When we returned to the sixth floor most of the officers had gone elsewhere and only the crime scene people and a token security group remained. After clearing with Sgt. Flusche I was released to return to the Northeast Station so I set out to find my partner. Gerry was waiting for me at the car. He told me that he had been assigned to help with the search of the railroad yard and that nothing eventful had occurred.

We had started back to Northeast Station at around 4 pm and realized that we had nothing to eat all day. We had left Gerry's car at a Fire Station located at Samuel Blvd. and East Grand and just a block away was one of our favorite eating places so we stopped for a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

After eating I dropped Gerry off at his squad car and drove back to the Station, left the car in the garage area, and checked in with the duty supervisor.

Having no further assignment I changed clothes and started home. There was one stop to make and that was to leave my filthy uniform at the dry cleaner.

Arriving home I found that my fiancée Edna was there and she and my father were watching the events of the day on television and preparing dinner. They both knew that my assignment had been to patrol East Dallas and that I had no part in the presidential visit so they were surprised to learn what had actually transpired.

They were even more surprised to learn that the assassin's weapon was an Italian Carcano carbine like the six that my father had purchased for ten dollars each.

I was never interviewed by anyone from the Warren Commission or anyone else from any of the investigating agencies. I had no idea that my name was anywhere in the Warren Report until four years ago when I was contacted by Researcher Ian Griggs who had located me from Capt. C.E. Talbert's accounting of his officer's activities for November 22, 1963.

Sgt. Don Flusche and I discussed this shortly before his death last year. It was Don's opinion that Capt. Talbert's mention of me as the finder of the rifle resulted from a hand written report in which he had detailed the six floor activities that he had supervised. I believe that if the attic search had not occurred much of the confusion surrounding the manufacturer of the rifle would have been eliminated. Several "experts" erroneously labeled it as a 7.65 Mauser while the two people that actually knew its make were crawling through the attic of the Texas School Book Depository. ([peckwl@aol.com](mailto:peckwl@aol.com))

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This accounting of the events of November 22, 1963 is dedicated to two

people who have poked, prodded and otherwise inspired me to this undertaking. It is also dedicated to the memory of a great friend and mentor.

The first is my dear and wonderful wife Edna, whose love and devotion give my life meaning.



The second is Ian Griggs, noted British Author and Researcher whose eagle eye found what others had missed in the Warren Report.



The third dedication is to the memory of Donald F. Flusche Sr. a great friend and true hero.

## **MEDAL of HONOR**



Sgt. Donald F. Flusche

Donald F. Flusche, #1034, was awarded the Department's highest award, the Police Medal of Honor for saving a child at extreme risk to his own life. On April 20, 1960, Sergeant Flusche was working in uniform at an off duty job at a local rice trade when some gasoline bottles caught fire in one of the buildings. Inside were the tavern's owner and his ten year old daughter. The man escaped but the girl was trapped inside. A solid wall of flaming gas prevented entry through the door but Flusche found a small pay window at the side of the building. Through the flames racing from the exterior outlets

he saw the little girl huddled under a cold drink box in the corner. He dove headfirst through the window and rushed to her. Flusche pulled the child from under the box and while sheltering her from the jets of flame with his body, led his way along the wall. He saw the window, threw the girl to some people outside and jumped from the building. Both Sergeant Flusche and the girl received serious burns but no permanent injuries. Without regard for his personal safety in the face of danger unknown to him, Sergeant Flusche took a real calculated chance and saved the little girl from certain death by fire.

